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SUBJECT: ATHENS TIP CONFERENCE RAISES AWARENESS ON NEED TO COORDINATE AGAINST TRAFFICKING

REF: THESSALONIKI 0014

1. SUMMARY: An embassy-organized Athens TIP symposium on February 23 raised awareness on the need for better cooperation among law enforcement and justice officials to fight trafficking in Greece. Following the February 15-16 training seminar for Greek judiciary and police officers in Thessaloniki (reftel), the Athens event, under the title "The Role of the Judiciary in Combating Trafficking," attracted approximately 200 judges, prosecutors, police and NGO representatives. Ambassador Ries and Justice Minister Papaligouras opened the symposium, while Ambassador Verros, the Greek National Coordinator for Anti-Trafficking, actively participated in all sessions. Following lively discussions, the conclusion of the symposium was that Greek officials need more training and better communication among their respective agencies, as well as assistance by specially-trained social workers, psychologists and translators. Although the work of NGOs was recognized as important, especially in identifying TIP victims, questions were raised about how to verify their reliability. END SUMMARY.

2. At a February 23 Embassy-organized TIP symposium co-sponsored by the National Commission of Administrative Courts, Hellenic Aid (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' foreign aid agency), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Justice Minister Papaligouras discussed the key role of the judiciary in identifying TIP victims and in raising public awareness about the nature and extent of trafficking. Ambassador Ries congratulated the Greek government on the National Action Plan and Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee. He stressed the importance of the combined efforts of the government, international organizations, and NGOs in the face of changing trends in trafficking. U.S. Embassy Sofia Resident Legal Advisor Tom Peebles participated in the symposium, noting that trafficking is a key business for international crime syndicates, that trans-border cooperation is paramount in combating it, and that the U.S. is committed to providing assistance to countries in the region to deal with this problem.

3. Every official (Greek and American) mentioned the need for a collective effort at the local, bilateral and international level in order for the phenomenon to be eradicated. The speakers, each involved in the judicial process against trafficking in a different capacity, identified weaknesses of the current Greek system. Maria Malouhou, prosecutor at the Athens First Instance Court and special prosecutor for TIP, made suggestions for strengthening and implementing the anti-trafficking law. Daniel Esdras, head of IOM in Greece, highlighted the new forms that trafficking has taken in Greece. Victims less frequently appear in Greece as illegal immigrants but often hold legal visas and travel documents, which may be held by their traffickers. Victims have limited freedom, and might possess cellular phones, creating the impressions that they are voluntary prostitutes, he noted.

4. Conclusions of the conference were that a) more training is needed for the parties involved at all levels in the fight against trafficking; b) the lack of expert assistance (social workers, psychologists, translators) for anti-TIP authorities often results in ineffective identification of trafficking victims; and c) there is a lack of coordination and communication at the working level between the police, judiciary and other government entities involved in the process. The shortcomings of the current anti-trafficking system were further confirmed, according to one of the speakers, by the fact that shelters in Greece and other European countries remain empty. Several speakers made the point that traffickers continuously adjust their practices and render law enforcement and judicial methods obsolete very quickly. They stressed that this makes the need for collaboration between the various branches of government, as well as trans-border collaboration, all the more critical.

5. Though stressing the necessity of NGOs, an Athens prosecutor mentioned the lack of information from the state regarding the reliability of NGOs. When she dealt with a

child repatriation case last year, she had no resources to find "reputable" NGOs in Greece and in Albania as partners. The National Coordinator for Anti-Trafficking responded that the MFA keeps a list of legitimate NGOs, and commitments were made to address this issue. The conference brought NGOs and justice officials together to start building these essential working-level connections.

16. One of the highlights of the symposium was the presentation by IOM attorney Eleni Glegle. Glegle, a recent International Visitor grantee, told the audience that "Greece needs to adopt the U.S. model of networking between the government and the NGOs." Acting as prosecutor's counsel, Glegle recently won a landmark trafficking trial in northern Greece, where a local man was convicted of trafficking a Ukrainian woman, despite a parade of community witnesses who testified to the trafficker's standing in the village. In her comments to the symposium, Glegle thanked U.S. Justice Department attorney Luis DeBaca, whom she met during her IV trip and who advised her throughout the trial. She has been tapped by the Greek Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs to work on projects regarding trafficking issues in Greece.

17. COMMENT: The presence of the Minister of Justice and the large number of participants at the symposium point to a greater Greek interest in fighting trafficking. As Greece focuses more on addressing TIP issues, officials involved have started to understand the inadequacies of the system and the need for improvement. According to several speakers, the GoG must continue to build trust between competent authorities and NGOs and to promote TIP training and lateral cooperation among the bodies of government involved in combating trafficking. END COMMENT.